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Morris Healthy Eating Initiative leader Naomi Wente '13 facilitates partnership with Pomme de Terre Foods Coop

Summary: The Morris Healthy Eating Initiative and Pomme de Terre Foods Coop share the goal of making fresh produce easily accessible.

(August 25, 2010)-Local foods make Naomi Wente's mouth water, and when someone brings up the topic of fresh, organic, juicy fruits and vegetables, the University of Minnesota, Morris sophomore from Dodge Center says she shivers with anticipation. Wente loves healthy foods, and she's a perfect fit to serve as a Morris Healthy Eating Initiative (MHE) student leader. She's a volunteer and member of the Pomme de Terre (PdT) Foods Co-op in Morris and serves on the PdT Board of Directors.

MHE's main goal is to help make the healthy choice the easy choice. MHE is one of eight projects throughout the state selected to work with Blue Cross and Blue Cross of Minnesota to improve campus and community food choices through environment and policy change. Wente, who majors in environmental studies and political science, is working on the MHE vision to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to the PdT. Last winter, she helped conduct extensive research to survey what PdT shoppers want to purchase from the co-op in terms of fruits and vegetables.

"The results screamed 'Yes!' she recounts, "with nearly nine out of ten PdT customers, 87 percent, wanting to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at PdT, especially locally grown and organic produce."

Since this spring, the MHE and PdT in partnership have been making advances in the shared goal of making fresh fruits and vegetables easily accessible.

"I am thrilled to report that progress has been made," shares Wente. "Bill Gessner from CDS Consulting Co-op assessed the co-op and held a workshop for the PdT board, community members, and MHE. The purpose was to help get the ball rolling with the fresh produce. And, it worked. The board members are hyped up, and a produce team is working on a list of tasks! Yes, there will be many obstacles and details to work out, but according to the business plan that was hatched out at the workshop, PdT hopes to start selling fresh produce to its customers by the end of the summer! With dedication like this, MHE and PdT are making the healthy choice the easy choice."

In addition to PdT, MHE works with the UMM Organic Garden Club, the Pride of the Prairie Local Foods Initiative, Campus Dining Services, Stevens Community Medical Center, Kadejan, Inc., the Morris Area Farmers Market, Stevens County Human Services, Stevens Traverse Grant Public Health, University of Minnesota West Central Research and Outreach Center, and West Central Wellness.

Photo credit Courtney Driessen '12, Bloomington

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